



Exercise 4.5

Connecting Prose to People



While it is important to recognize which words will help a general audience understand a message, it is also important to know how to personalize information so individuals feel you are speaking to them. This exercise builds on **Exercise 4.4: An Edict to Edit** by adapting that revised text to better meet the needs of particular audience members.

Objective: Participants will be able to identify ways to construct their messages to meet the needs of specific types of interface audiences.

Materials:

Copies of revised text from *Exercise 4.4: An Edict to Edit*
Copies of *Handout 1: Audience Cards*—one set of cards per group
Presentation 4.1

Time: 30 minutes

Exercise 4.4: An Edict to Edit enables workshop participants to consider the basics of translating written technical information in a way that the general public will understand. Each member of an audience, however, has different needs and experiences. This exercise enables participants to think about the types of comments, examples, and adaptations that will help connect their message to individual members of the audience. The final challenge is to consider adapting a presentation to meet all of these needs in a group. **Presentation 4.1** offers some guidance for this exercise.

Before you begin, choose the audience cards from *Handout 1: Audience Cards* that you wish to use for this exercise. Duplicate the set so that there will be a different card for each person in a group. Each group will get the same set of cards. Some cards may be most useful for interface issues that affect individual property owners. Others cards could be used for situations that involve the community.

1. Using the small groups that were formed during **Exercise 4.4: An Edict to Edit** and the revised text from that activity, distribute the audience cards to each group. Ask each participant to make a change or two to the paragraph that will help make the information relevant and meaningful to the audience on the card. It might be easiest to add an additional paragraph that builds a connection to the audience. Helpful techniques include offering examples, foreshadowing additional information, suggesting alternatives, or redefining the problem. Be sure to explain that these stereotypes are not meant to disparage any group. They are exaggerated to make clear the values and interests these groups hold. They all refer to real people who have real concerns about the interface, and resource professionals need to be able to communicate with them all.

2. After five minutes, ask them to share their audience cards and changes with the rest of their small groups.
3. Remind the groups that while all of these people may not be in the same audience, they could be, so the real challenge is how to communicate so that everyone can relate personally to the message. Ask each group to generate one revised paragraph, but this time reflect *all* the changes they would like to make for an audience made up of *all* these individuals. Which changes could address more than one audience member? Which changes probably make the message better for everyone?
4. After 15 minutes, ask each group to present its paragraph. For each presentation, ask the listeners to identify the changes that were made for the audience card they hold.

Summary

While this exercise is exaggerated and deliberately challenging, remind your participants that real audiences are indeed made up of individuals who have different values and concerns. Some of their differences may be important to recognize and respect through the choice of examples, the choice of words, and the tone of a presentation.

Handout 1: Audience Cards



Commuter

You commute from your home in the interface to work in the nearby city each day. It is only 40 miles, but with the traffic and stop lights it usually takes you an hour. You leave the house each workday at 6 a.m. to beat most of the school buses, and get home between 7 and 8 p.m. You like your work and you like your home. You have decided that two extra hours a day are a small price to pay for the natural surroundings, the fresh air, the relaxed pace, and the crime-free neighborhood you live in. You just don't have a lot of time to enjoy it.



Low Income Resident

You work as a housekeeper in a local motel and drive a school bus part-time. You need both jobs to make ends meet. You don't have a lot of money for anything, but your highest priority is to provide your children with nice clothes and the school supplies that they need. You do not want anyone to identify you as poor.



Second Language Speaker

You emigrated from Mexico to find better work opportunities. You are lucky because both you and your wife found seasonal jobs in the fields harvesting local crops: cotton, onions, melons, and sweet potatoes. You are part of a large Mexican community and there are very few reasons for you to interact with English-speaking locals. As a result, you are still struggling to learn English.



Religious Believer

You are so pleased to have found a meaningful religious community and believe your mission on earth is to support your family and improve your community. You are not preachy in your interaction with others, but much of your approach to life acknowledges that you trust the Lord with all your heart and soul. You believe that everything happens for a reason and God wants it that way.

**Over-Committed Parent**

Your kids keep you busy as a “taxi driver,” moving between soccer practice, band practice, and scout meetings every week. You are also an officer in the local Junior League and each year you organize a benefit for the local American Cancer Society chapter. You attend church each Sunday, sing in the choir, and teach a Sunday school class for 5th graders. You’d like to slow down a bit, but you believe everything you do is important.

**Elderly Resident**

You retired to this interface community five years ago. Your children and grandchildren visit twice a year and sometimes help out with maintenance chores. Otherwise, the big projects suffer a bit. The house needs to be painted, the bushes need to be trimmed, and you don’t have the strength, equipment, or budget to do it.

**Large Landowner**

You own 250 acres of forest and agricultural land about two miles from the nearest subdivision. You harvest some timber, and have about 75 acres in hay that you sell to a neighbor. You have taken good care of your land for 35 years and enjoy seeing the seasonal changes, the nesting birds, and the returning turkeys. You are interested in learning more about how you can continue to be a good steward.

**County Commissioner**

You were recently elected on a platform of “good growth.” You know your county has valuable natural resources that people treasure and that attract newcomers to the region. As large tracts of land become available, developers are converting them to homes and shopping areas, enriching the community coffers. A good balance of development and conservation should be possible.



Local Developer

You have had your eye on a prize piece of farmland for several years. As soon as the landowner decides to sell, you will be ready with plans for a huge complex of shops, offices, small homes, and mansions. You know how to put a package together that will sell properties because you know where to find good deals, which corners can be cut, and how to avoid lengthy delays with government regulation.



Local Environmental Advocate

You came to this area 10 years ago before it was discovered by developers. The rivers and forests are still intact, but you fear that the plans for the region will not protect the resources from development. You coordinate the local Christmas bird count and serve as an officer in a local environmental organization. You care deeply about the integrity of the local ecosystem.



Grocery Store Owner

You just expanded your facility to be able to offer more varieties of produce, frozen food, and ethnic foods to the increasing number of customers who want healthy low-fat meals, quick ready-to-eat meals, or Mexican meals. You are pleased with the expanding development of the area since it will bring even more customers through your doors. You have a great location near a major intersection, but you are concerned that a competing chain could buy the property across the street.



Ranchette Telecommuter

You lived frugally for many years so that you could afford your dream home long before you retired. Three years ago the opportunity came and now you and your family live in a lovely home on 25 acres. You are able to work at home and value the peace and quiet that your isolation brings. You want to improve wildlife habitat, so you feed deer and songbirds. You might get a horse or some goats for the kids.